

plicates the past as it truly was. Muslims must decide whether to follow the Iranian example, or, as Lewis says, "find a better alternative, in order to return to the . . . Islam of the Prophet."

ADAM, EVE, AND THE SERPENT

by Elaine Pagels
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Current attacks on Judeo-Christian morality have sent scholars in search of alternative moral strategies. Pagels, a Princeton professor of religion, suggests that we look to the past—to the first four centuries after Christ—to see how basic ideas regarding sexuality, freedom, and human nature were formulated. How did it happen, she asks, that by the end of this period a doctrine that had once celebrated human freedom had become one that stressed the bondage of original sin?

Pagels explains how major figures of the early church interpreted the Genesis story of Adam and Eve—from the Apostle Paul to Augustine of Hippo. Early on, when Christians were persecuted within the Roman Empire, they were buoyed by Jesus's promise of redemption and freedom from man's fallen condition. But as early as the third century A.D., orthodox Christians shunned the Gnostics for their loose, allegorical interpretation of the creation. Increasingly, Christians embraced the Apostle Paul's teachings, that sexuality was the source of man's sinful state. Zealous ascetics such as St. Anthony sought to regain prelapsarian innocence by rejecting the desires of mind and body. Finally, during the century after Emperor Constantine's conversion (A.D. 313), as Christianity became the established faith of the Empire, Bishop Augustine (A.D. 354–430) brought the understanding of Adam and Eve full circle: "Adam's sin not only caused our mortality," Pagels writes, "but cost our moral freedom, irreversibly corrupted our experience of sexuality . . . and made us incapable of genuine political freedom."

But Augustine's view did not hold sway in the West for 16 centuries simply because of its political utility. Pagels speculates that its power is paradoxical, a promise of freedom within unfreedom: Augustine attributed man's often miserable fate to a real and logical cause, the sins he willingly commits; at the same time, he attributed man's sinful nature to Adam and Eve's fall. The doctrine appeals, says Pagels, "to the human need to imagine ourselves in control, even at the cost of guilt."